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THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART'S PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION IS CELEBRATED IN MAJOR EXHIBITION

(Cleveland, OH) The Cleveland Museum of Art presents **Legacy of Light: Master Photographs from the Cleveland Museum of Art,** the first major exhibition to focus on the museum's distinguished photography collection, on view November 24, 1996 to February 2, 1997. **Legacy of Light** follows the growth and maturation of photography from a scientific curiosity in the 1840s to one of the most potent forms of artistic expression of the 20th century. The exhibition also represents the public debut of Cleveland's photography collection, conceived and nurtured under the museum's trademark philosophy of aesthetic connoisseurship and historical balance. **Legacy of Light** was organized by Tom E. Hinson, curator of contemporary art and photography. Admission is free.

At present, the CMA has photography holdings of more than 1,850 works—a collection which, while modest in size, illuminates the history of this artistic medium with carefully selected groups of photographs by exceptional artists. **Legacy of Light** brings together works by 131 of these artists into a single exhibition that at once traces the rich history of the medium and reveals the breadth and depth of the museum's collection. Each photographer in this exhibition is represented by one work (some works are made up of multiple photographs, bringing the total number of images to 146).

Director Robert Bergman says:

> For more than a decade, the museum has worked intensely to build a great photography collection, so we are all very pleased to see the finest fruits of our labors gathered together for this show. The photographers whose work appears in this exhibition—inventors, naturalists, formalists, journalists, portraitists, social activists, avant-garde experimenters—are surely among the finest artists of the past 150 years. We are especially proud to offer this exhibition to Clevelanders in the city's bicentennial year. Special thanks to Centerior Energy Corporation and the Cleveland Foundation whose generous support has made this show possible.

In tracing the history of photography, the exhibition tells two stories: one of the birth and development of a technical process, the other of the concurrent and subsequent flowering of the skills of creative artists using the medium (see the accompanying Photography Timeline for a graphic presentation of the history of photography, illustrated with works from the Cleveland

collection). In telling these stories, the show falls into three sections, each representing a fifty-year period, and each reflecting a major evolutionary division in the technical capabilities and aesthetic uses of the medium.

The first fifty years of photography saw the invention of the process and technical refinements that made it possible for artists to aspire toward literal rendering of their subjects. There were three predominant processes during this period: the daguerreotype (invented in 1839 by Louis-Mandé Daguerre), the calotype and related methods, and the albumen print from a wet collodion negative. The oldest photograph in the show is a daguerreotype from about 1842 by pioneering French commercial photographer Louis-Auguste Bisson—the name of the horse is, coincidentally, "Cleveland." The calotype (unlike the one-of-a-kind daguerreotype) employed a paper negative that could be used to make multiple prints, which were soft and diffused, with broad areas of dark and light. The exhibition features *Articles of Glass,* a dazzling print of a still-life arrangement of crystal glassware by William Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the process. The Scottish portraitists David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson made their luminous 1844-45 portrait, *Elizabeth Rigby, later Lady Eastlake,* using the process. In France, Julien Vallou de Villeneuve found the process to be well-suited to photographing the nude. His *Study after Nature* (1845) is in the exhibition.

The sharpness of the daguerreotype and the repeatability of the positive/negative process came together in 1848 with the invention by Englishman Frederick Scott Archer of the wet collodion process. The new technique was demanding, requiring the photographer to work adjacent to a darkroom using large plates of glass coated with a wet, light-sensitive solution, but the results could be stunning. The show features many superb examples, including a number of works by the first great wave of landscapists and architectural photographers who ventured with their cumbersome, barely portable laboratories into the gardens of Paris, the ruins of Egypt, and the vast wildernesses of the American West. Says Tom Hinson: "The Englishman Francis Frith may best epitomize the skill and daring of these early entrepreneurial photographers. His mammoth-plate photographs such as the *Fallen Statue at the Ramesseum, Thebes* (1857) are an outstanding contribution to the history of photography." In America, photographers gravitated toward the awesome landscape, particularly that of California's Yosemite Valley. The exhibition includes three mammoth-plate (as large as 2 x 2-1/2 *feet*) wet collodion process photographs of that location by three major landscapists: Carleton E. Watkins, Charles Leander Weed, and Eadweard Muybridge.

In the next fifty years, technical innovations to greatly improve accuracy of detail and the capture of fleeting moments gave rise to photography as a dominant visual presence in modern life. The mass-production of compact cameras and roll film put photography into the hands of the masses and advances in print reproduction processes put photographic imagery into books, magazines, and newspapers. Out of this came a great proliferation of photographic styles.

A popular movement at the turn of the century was pictorialism, whose early proponents included Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz. One pictorialist image in the show, Steichen's *Rodin-le Penseur,*

presents the famous sculptor August Rodin in his crowded studio. A decade after declaring himself a pictorialist, Alfred Stieglitz abandoned that style to create unmanipulated "straight" photographs with sharp focus and beautiful tonal range. His most famous work is the group of photographs of his wife, the painter Georgia O'Keeffe, taken over a twenty-year span. In this exhibition is *Georgia O'Keeffe's Hand and Wheel,* with O'Keeffe's hand curved in front of a shiny hubcap. Other photographers—some of the century's most famous—adopted his approach: Edward Weston and Ansel Adams are among the familiar names whose work is in the show.

A spontaneous documentary style was made possible by faster, lighter, quieter, more versatile cameras. Frenchman Henri Cartier-Bresson, using new 35mm camera technology, based his entire career on anticipating what he called the "decisive moment" to release the shutter to record a perfect slice of time that would tell an entire story in one image. His *Quartier de la Chapelle, Paris,* made in 1928 or 29, offers just such a moment, as a woman walking along a city street glances down at a sleeping vagrant. Lewis Hine used the medium to record and advocate for social change. His famous photograph *Powerhouse Mechanic* was part of a project celebrating the dignity of working people. One young photojournalist, Margaret Bourke-White, established her career in Cleveland with powerful images of its cityscape during the late 1920s (represented in the show by *Terminal Tower, Cleveland,* 1928).

Meanwhile, a growing avant-garde, spurred on by concurrent artistic movements, ignored the documentary style. Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy, Arthur Siegel, and Jaromír Funke are all represented in **Legacy of Light** by photograms—images made without a camera by arranging objects on top of photo paper and flashing on a light source to create abstract light and shadow compositions.

Despite technical refinements since the documentary style was born, late- 20th-century photojournalists have worked in essentially the same way as the earliest practitioners. Roy DeCarava's portrait of a boy standing on the street *(David, New York)* is from a book he created with poet Langston Hughes in 1955: *The Sweet Fly Paper of Life*. Among the CMA's most recent acquisitions is Thomas Struth's enormous 1995 color print, *San Zaccharia,* which shows the interior of the famous church in Venice, complete with renowned frescoes, religious implements, worshipers, and tourists.

Many recent photographers have defied the expectations associated with established genres. In the 1980s and 90s, William Wegman's anthropomorphized portraits of his Weimaraner dogs have humorously raised interesting questions about the concept of a portrait. Sally Mann's *Black Eye* (1990) plays against the standard notion of a portrait as an idealizing image; Joel Peter Witkin's *Man Without Legs, New York City* (1991) goes a bit further, challenging the notion of art as something one enjoys looking at.

To late twentieth-century artists, landscape often means cityscape. In *Composites: Philadelphia (Apertures),* Ray Metzker created a montage of 240 tiny prints of Philadelphia buildings, a metaphorical rendering of the frenetic vitality and faceless repetitiousness of urban life. Kenneth Snelson's panoramic view of *Brooklyn Bridge,* 15-1/2 inches high by 7-1/2 feet long, offers an optically distorted twist on the famous

New York cityscape, the iconic skyline tucked neatly off to one side, dwarfed by a huge sweeping arch of the bridge.

Approaches to still life are just as varied. Where artists like Jan Groover might arrange utilitarian objects to create straightforward images, Michael Spano employed a camera with eight lenses (originally developed to critique golf swings) in order to photograph his subjects from multiple perspectives in eight sequential exposures. William Eggleston's color print *Near the River at Greenville, Mississippi* (1983-86) combines green grass, an orange electrical cord, a black outdoor grill, and a hatchet to evoke a sense of unease, a feeling also present in William Sommer's 1950 work, *The Eatable Thief,* with its cloth-wrapped, cobweb-encrusted doll lying in a decaying cardboard box. In *Der Kyffhäuser* (ca. 1981), Anselm Kiefer combined two dark photographs, one of a cavernous interior space, the other of a black pool in which floats an artist's palette, and then painted over the images with energetic marks and the words of the title.

The Cleveland Museum of Art opened its doors in 1916, about halfway through the 150-year history of the photographic process, and just at the dawn of the medium's wide acceptance as a mode of artistic expression. In 1935 a donor gave the museum an important group of 10 prints by Alfred Stieglitz. A handful of other important gifts and an occasional purchase from the museum's annual juried May Show of works by regional artists gradually added to the holdings, but it wasn't until the early 1980s that the museum began in earnest to build a fine and comprehensive photography collection. That effort concentrated first on acquiring works from the early years of the medium (which have become increasingly rare), and subsequently on building a fine collection of photographs by 20th-century artists. **Legacy of Light** celebrates the success of those efforts.

The museum will publish a catalogue with more than 1,100 color and duotone illustrations spread over approximately 500 pages. This volume will comprehensively present the photography collection as of 1996, including biographical entries on all 377 artists represented in the museum's holdings. Dr. Evan H. Turner, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art from 1983 to 1993, has written a preface to the catalogue, discussing the museum's plans for building a world-class photography collection. The introduction, written by Tom Hinson, provides an overview of the collection with in-depth discussion of twenty-eight works, to be illustrated in color. The catalogue is scheduled to be available in December, 1996.

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The last of four exhibitions presented by the CMA in honor of Cleveland's bicentennial, **Legacy of Light** is sponsored by Centerior Energy Corporation with additional support from The Cleveland Foundation. Promotional support is provided by the *Free Times.* An array of public programs relating to the exhibition will be offered. These will include films, lectures, Sunday afternoon gallery talks for adult audiences, and Sunday afternoon drop-in family workshops. (Please see the accompanying public programs release.)

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